

NY Post

Jan 6, 1972

Creator of DNA Scores Talk of 'Biological Bomb'

By ARTHUR J. SNIDER

CHICAGO (CDN)—Nobel laureate Arthur Kornberg of Stanford blames "scare stories" by some scientists and the press for contributing to the hostility of the public toward molecular genetics.

Kornberg said: "People have been led to fear some kind of a biological bomb that will be worse than an atomic bomb."

The Stanford biologist, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1959 for his creation of artificial DNA, the master chemical of all life, said that he believes such "doomsday predictions are nonsense."

"What we will do with genetics is cure disease," he said, "by learning how to repair faulty DNA."

Some Wary Scientists

Kornberg said he knows a number of responsible scientists who oppose working with "aspects of genetic chemistry, and I just can't reason with them. If they come out in the newspapers with this kind of alarm there are major segments of the population who are going to react to it."

Kornberg said: "Predictors of doomsday capture the front pages, while those who work along trying to do a good, honest job are not considered newsworthy."

"Scientists are not skillful in rebutting this kind of information," he said. "We are not talented in public relations."

Kornberg said biologists are not able to issue a group statement vowing never to work on evil applications of molecular knowledge "because we are nowhere near the state of knowledge of the nuclear scientists."

"They realized they had all they needed to know to make the bomb," he continued. "We're much further behind. There is nothing we can do with the tools we have at hand. It is premature to worry about it. We don't have the equivalent of the Newtonian laws of motion to make a moon shot possible."

Kornberg said he had not expected the retrenchment that has taken place in biology.

"I did not anticipate the apathy, the hostility this kind of research would produce," he asserted. "I am baffled."

The cutback is being reflected by a severe drop in enrollment in biology courses by students who are turning to other careers.